



**SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**February 4, 2020 | 8:30-10:30am | Room 111 - Brookline Town Hall, 333 Washington Street,
Brookline, MA**

Committee Members in Attendance: Raul Fernandez (Chair), Debbie Miller, Sam Glasgow, Melissa Tapper Goldman, Annika Sarin, Debbie Raisner Thompson, and Talia Glass

Committee Members Not in Attendance: Mark Barer, David Leschinsky, Sandy Machado, Anne Meyers, Steve Silverman, Elias Audy, and Raj Dhanda

Staff: Meredith L. Mooney and Caitlin Starr

Members of the Public: Jules Milner-Brage (Pct. 12)

Materials Presented: 2/4/2020 agenda; Draft December 10, 2019 meeting minutes; Compilation of January 2020 SBDC subcommittee meeting minutes; Memo and slide deck from the Economic Development Division's January 28th presentation to the Select Board regarding the Coolidge Corner BID Steering Committee; Recommended Best Practices for Inclusion document; Brookline Commission, Committee, and Board Demographic Survey; a link to the [Small Business Development Committee's Pinterest page](#); and a link to a committee-member recommended 1/24/2019 *Boston Globe* news article: [Diverse, locally owned food start-ups make the menus at Harvard, UMass, and BC](#)

Meeting Minutes

Approval of the December 10, 2019 Minutes:

- **The Small Business Development Committee (SBDC) approved the December 10, 2019 meeting minutes 7-0-0.** Talia Glass joined the meeting at 9am after the meeting minutes vote.

Public Comment: No general public comment was given, however, public comment was contributed later in the meeting during the Commercial Areas Experience Subcommittee Update.

Chair Updates (Raul Fernandez): Raul Fernandez reported that Sadhna Gupta Brown, an original applicant for the SBDC, who was unable to join the committee in fall 2019, remains interested in serving on the committee and the Women and POC-Owned Businesses Subcommittee.

A concern was raised about how expanding committee membership could make it more challenging to achieve a quorum at future SBDC meetings.

Staff Updates (Meredith L. Mooney):

- Potential Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article Topics:

- In pursuit of the SBDC's goal of submitting a spring Town Meeting warrant article, staff had investigated a question raised by the Commercial Areas Experience Subcommittee: Is it legal for residents to rent parking spaces for non-residential use (e.g. Could a resident rent a parking space to an employee of a nearby business?)? And if not, could the SBDC's spring Town Meeting warrant article address this issue?
 - After conferring with the Building Commissioner, Assistant Director for Regulatory Planning, and Director of Economic Development, SBDC staff concluded that residential properties that border commercial zoning districts are able to rent parking spaces on their property for non-residential use by special permit and with an Open Air License. If the SBDC was interested in eliminating the special permit requirement or expanding this option to include more residential areas, a zoning by-law change would be required.
 - Staff recommended against pursuing this particular issue for Spring Town Meeting, and advised that the committee should first:
 - Conduct outreach to business and property owners regarding the opportunities created by 2019 Fall Town Meeting's Warrant Article 15, which eliminated the minimum parking requirements in commercial areas.
 - Conduct outreach to residential areas abutting commercial areas to gauge resident interest in renting out spaces, as well as estimate the number of parking spaces that would be available for rent.
 - The following issues were raised in the committee's discussion about this potential warrant article topic and staff's recommendation:
 - There could be potential unintended consequences to expanding the ability to rent residential spaces for non-residential use. Many questions remain: about if and how this proposal would free up parking inventory; what the current and potential parking inventory is; and how the market value of parking spaces would be impacted by this proposal.
 - This warrant article idea was floated as a potential low-hanging fruit solution to address the question of "How can we better utilize extra parking inventory in Brookline?" After further investigation, however, it does not appear to be a low-hanging fruit solution. Additional consideration is needed. If the committee did decide to pursue this proposal, perhaps it would be more appropriate to file this as a fall 2020 Town Meeting warrant article.
- Staff presented the Small Business Development Committee with another potential warrant article option: sponsorship of a warrant article developed by Rep. Tommy Vitolo and the Economic Development Division to reallocate the remaining Washington Square special liquor licenses, which are due to expire in October 2020 if left unused, to other

commercial areas, such as Coolidge Corner or Brookline Village, where there's greater demand for liquor licenses.

- The committee discussed how allowing the remaining Washington Square liquor licenses expire would be a detriment and missed opportunity for Brookline's commercial areas and business community. Because of this, it makes sense for the Small Business Development Committee to sponsor/champion this warrant article.
- Sam Glasgow, chair of the Regulatory Subcommittee, agreed to be the lead sponsor for this warrant article.

- **Select Board Approval of the SBDC's Coolidge Corner Business Improvement District (BID) Steering Committee Recommendation:**

- At their January 28th meeting, the Select Board unanimously approved the SBDC's December 10th recommendation to direct Town staff to support the Coolidge Corner BID Steering Committee's efforts to develop a comprehensive proposal for a Coolidge Corner BID.

Subcommittee Reports:

- **Commercial Areas Experience Subcommittee (Melissa Tapper Goldman):**

- Parking:
 - In discussing the possibility of recommending a parking study for Brookline and Brookline's commercial areas, the subcommittee identified several key items needed to inform its deliberation on this issue:
 - More information about past studies and study recommendations is needed. The subcommittee is working with committee staff to gather that information and identify Town Hall staff that might be able to present an overview of past parking studies and recommendations.
 - Learn more about why a parking deck in the Centre Street lot is so politically controversial.
 - Determine business employee transportation and parking needs. This information could be gathered through a survey and in-person outreach to local businesses.
 - The need to build grassroots support for any proposed parking policy changes in the future.
 - Centre Street Parking Lot: The possibility of decking the Centre Street Lot has been discussed and studied extensively in the past. Abutting neighbors are very opposed to this idea. It's likely that sustainability advocates would also oppose such a proposal if more parking spaces were created as a result.
 - Parking is a huge pain point. The voice and concerns of the business community need to be included in this discussion.

- The recent increase in business community advocacy efforts/the visibility of the business community regarding these issues may have impacted the community's appreciation of the impact that parking challenges have on Brookline's commercial areas, perhaps creating a shift away from the "us versus them" mentality around this issue. The time might be right for increased business community participate in town-wide advocacy on parking issues.
- The SBDC needs to consider how to market itself to Town Meeting Members and the Brookline community at large. The visioning exercise could be an effective advocacy and communication tool for the committee's advocacy efforts. Studies and data are important, but the creation of a compelling vision is also critical.
- Public Comment (Jules Milner-Brage): Fear, uncertainty, and doubt fuel residents' reservations about parking changes. It's important to link any proposed changes to improvements in the commercial areas and the pedestrian experience. For example, the creation of a parking deck could make it possible to expand the width of the sidewalks in Coolidge Corner. The SBDC should coordinate with the joint Preservation Commission and Planning Board committee that's developing Beacon Street Design Guidelines.
- Visioning Exercise: Engaging the committee in a visioning exercise to inform the committee's goals is needed. Melissa Tapper Goldman, with the support and input of the Commercial Areas Subcommittee, is willing to take the lead on developing and facilitating this exercise. Annika Sarin expressed interest in helping to develop the visioning exercise, as well.
- Pop-Ups: Pop-ups require an outsized amount of marketing and promotion. Single pop-ups will not encourage the amount of foot traffic needed to benefit a commercial area, indicating that pop-ups in and of themselves are not an effective commercial area activation tools. Pop-ups are more successful in clusters, such as Bow Market. Or would be more beneficial in commercial areas with existing foot traffic, like Coolidge Corner.
 - The creation micro-unit storefronts could:
 - Provide opportunities for smaller businesses to road test concepts and/or a storefront presence.
 - Address obstacles such as rent.
 - Exploring the idea of micro-unit storefronts as a tactic for supporting new businesses in high rent areas could be an area of collaboration for the Commercial Areas Experience and Regulatory Subcommittees.
 - A potential goal for that collaboration could be to identify a space in Town that could lend itself to a Bow Marke-inspired, pop-up venue format.

- Key questions that would need to be considered: Who would develop such a space? What role would the Town play in dictating the goals and priorities of such a development project?
 - Other considerations:
 - Limitations on available space in Brookline (i.e. for large-scale development projects) due to real estate pressures in Brookline.
 - The Arcade Building would be an ideal pop-up space.
 - Marketing: The subcommittee briefly discussed the marketing of Brookline's commercial areas; however, the role of the local government in this initiative is not clear. Marketing is not a core competency of the Town government.
- **Regulatory Subcommittee (Sam Glasgow):**
 - The subcommittee identified the following potential low-hanging fruit action items:
 - Explore opportunities for expanding and increasing the utilization of the Town's existing Façade Loan Program.
 - Support a warrant article that would redistribute any remaining special liquor licenses in Washington Square to other commercial areas where there's greater demand for liquor licenses.
 - Develop a comprehensive guide to opening a business in Brookline. There's room for improvement on the Town's existing opening a business guide.
 - Subcommittee members support promoting greater density in Brookline's commercial areas, however championing this is a challenging undertaking.
 - There have been many studies undertaken that support this recommendation (e.g. the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) 2018 report [Perspectives and Opportunities for Brookline's Commercial Areas](#)). The subcommittee discussed the importance of taking meaningful actions to execute on the recommendations and learnings from these recent studies.
 - The subcommittee explored how the Regulatory Subcommittee and the SBDC can help to change negative attitudes in Town about the value of promoting increased density. Potential areas of focus to address this question include: strategic outreach to Town Meeting Members and developing a vision for our commercial areas.
- A question was raised about whether the SBDC should be more focused on conducting a small business needs assessment survey to serve as the basis of the SBDC's goals and work.
 - The Women and POC-owned Business Subcommittee had explored the idea of organizing an outreach event to identify such needs, but discovered that it's incredibly challenging to bring business owners together at one event. The subcommittee has decided instead to focus on one-on-one outreach.
 - It was suggested that distributing a survey to business owners would be more effective so that they can respond at their convenience. However, based on the Chamber of

Commerce's experience with survey distribution, it's very challenging to get businesses to respond to surveys.

- Developing a needs assessment survey was suggested as a committee action item.
- Questions were raised about how to address the issue of rent, and how to promote greater transparency around rent rates.
 - It was reported that a rent transparency study had been undertaken in Coolidge Corner a few years ago, but was unsuccessful due to lack of business participation.
 - The SBDC should seek to learn more about why businesses were reluctant to share that information.
- **Women and POC-Owned Businesses Subcommittee (Annika Sarin):**
 - Irene Li from Mei Mei, located in Boston on the Brookline border at Audubon Circle, was a guest speaker at a recent subcommittee meeting.
 - Update on Warrant Article 29's Racial Equity Advancement Fund: A working group of the Diversity Inclusion and Community Relations (DICR) Commission members, as well as DICR and Economic Development staff has met twice to develop an application for that program. Raul Fernandez has been advocating for the SBDC to submit a proposal for that funding – hopefully for a business incubator for women and minority-owned businesses.
 - Committee members inquired about the status of compiling a database of businesses and identifying women and minority-owned businesses in Brookline.
 - No database with that information currently exists. According to a state list of certified women and minority-owned businesses, there are 14 in Brookline.
 - The subcommittee has discussed the need for more outreach around the WMBE (Women and/or Minority-Owned Business Enterprises) certification process to better understand why more businesses aren't certified. Are they unaware? Uninterested because the benefits aren't worthwhile? More understanding of the value and potential barriers is needed.
 - Exploring opportunities for the Town to compile a database was identified as a topic for further discussion.
 - Raul Fernandez engaged Natalia Urtubey the City of Boston's Director of Small Business in an early stage conversation about what Brookline can learn from Boston's programming. Raul will provide more updates.

Other Business:

- Melissa Tapper Goldman wanted to gauge the SBDC's interest in submitting letter in support of single-payer healthcare, an issue that the committee has discussed. Currently, there's not a lot

of business leadership around this issue. Melissa will draft a letter for the committee's review and the committee will vote on the proposal at the March 3rd meeting.

Next Steps: Subcommittees will continue to make progress and work to identify/hone subcommittee focus areas.

Meeting adjourned. The next SBDC meeting will be on March 3, 2020.